



# Uzbekistan's strategic reliance on Russia: The role of double landlock geography in shaping geopolitics

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## ABSTRACT

Uzbekistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, is entirely surrounded by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, and lacks direct access to the sea. This geographical disadvantage, combined with its historical ties to the Soviet Union, presents significant economic and geopolitical challenges. Uzbekistan's landlocked status limits its ability to engage in international trade, creating a reliance on neighboring countries, particularly Russia, for access to maritime routes. This dependence not only increases transportation costs but also complicates Uzbekistan's ability to fully integrate into global markets. As a result, Uzbekistan faces constraints in its economic development and must navigate complex political relationships with regional powers. This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive-explanatory methodology, incorporating geopolitics theory to analyze Uzbekistan's landlocked status. The findings highlight the significant consequences of being a landlocked country, emphasizing the political, economic, and diplomatic implications of Uzbekistan's dependence on Russia for port access and trade infrastructure.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is a country situated in Central Asia, shares direct geographical proximity to several other nations within the region. Having been a part of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan declared its independence in 1991. Despite its relatively recent separation from the USSR, Uzbekistan holds significant natural wealth, ranking as the fourth largest holder of gold reserves globally. This wealth offers Uzbekistan potential economic advantages, particularly within the context of the broader Central Asian region (Oh et al., 2018).

However, Uzbekistan faces a unique and challenging geographical situation. It is classified as a landlocked country, bordered by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. This situation places Uzbekistan in the category of a "double landlocked" nation, making it one of the only two such countries in the world. Without direct access to the sea, Uzbekistan faces considerable challenges in engaging in international trade that largely depends on maritime routes, which are vital for most global commerce (Umarova, 2025).

Given its landlocked status, Uzbekistan is forced to rely on neighboring countries to access international markets, making it necessary for the country to foster alliances with nations that have coastal access. As a developing country, Uzbekistan's geographical disadvantage further complicates its ability to fully engage in the global economy. Recognizing these challenges, the

United Nations has categorized Uzbekistan as a Landlocked Developing Country (LLDC), which highlights the difficulties these nations face in terms of trade, economic development, and geopolitical positioning (Dilshod, 2021).

The lack of direct access to the sea significantly impacts Uzbekistan's economic and industrial potential. Without the ability to access maritime trade routes, Uzbekistan loses out on opportunities in industries related to the sea, such as coastal tourism and fishing. This geographical disadvantage places Uzbekistan at a clear disadvantage compared to countries with access to the sea, limiting its growth prospects in terms of both development and international trade. Additionally, the inability to engage in the shipping industry makes it more dependent on overland and air routes, further increasing costs and complicating its ability to participate in global markets efficiently (Takele & Tveter, 2025).

The geographical constraints Uzbekistan faces also have a profound effect on its political landscape. To maintain economic growth and stability, Uzbekistan must depend on its neighboring countries for access to key trade routes and regional markets. This geographical disadvantage has resulted in Uzbekistan being forced to enter into strategic partnerships with its neighbors, particularly for the advancement of its economic interests. This geopolitical dependency is a significant factor in the country's political decisions, creating an environment where collaboration with neighboring states becomes crucial. Russia, as a more economically developed and militarily stronger power within Central Asia, has become a key partner for Uzbekistan. The relationship between the two countries has deep historical roots, with Uzbekistan being one of the Soviet Union's former republics. As an LLDC, Uzbekistan's reliance on Russia is essential for its economic development, as Russia's more developed infrastructure, access to trade routes, and geopolitical influence provide Uzbekistan with vital opportunities (Nurdiana, 2019).

The bilateral relationship between Uzbekistan and Russia is multifaceted, involving significant trade ties. Russia is one of Uzbekistan's largest trading partners, particularly in terms of exports. In addition to trade, Russia has significant role in regional economic initiatives that support Uzbekistan's economic development. Furthermore, Russia's visa-free policy for Uzbek migrants has led to significant labor migration, with many Uzbeks seeking employment in Russia for better wages, further strengthening the economic and social ties between the two nations (Eurasianet, 2023).

Uzbekistan's landlocked status presents numerous economic, political, and geopolitical challenges, forcing the country to rely heavily on its neighbors to maintain its economic growth and development. While natural resource wealth provides a strong foundation for growth, Uzbekistan's geographic limitations make it dependent on strategic partnerships, especially with Russia. The relationship between Uzbekistan and Russia, built on deep historical, economic, and labor migration ties, has important role in shaping Uzbekistan's regional and global positioning. Moving forward, maintaining and strengthening these relations will be essential for Uzbekistan to navigate its geographical constraints and ensure long-term economic stability (G. Ibragimova, 2025).

The complexities stemming from Uzbekistan's landlocked status, coupled with its strategic geopolitical and economic reliance on neighboring countries, particularly Russia, underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive examination of its international relations and trade dynamics. This research is important in understanding Uzbekistan navigates its challenges, leverages its natural resource wealth, and utilizes regional partnerships to advance its economic growth. Given the significant impact of Uzbekistan's geographical constraints on its political, economic, and security policies, exploring its bilateral relationship with Russia and the broader Central Asian region offers valuable insights into the nation's strategies for overcoming these limitations. Understanding these dynamics will provide a deeper understanding of how landlocked countries in Central Asia, like Uzbekistan, can optimize their geopolitical positioning, economic development, and international cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses qualitative research approach centered on case studies derived from real-world data, utilizing an explanatory methodology and contextual analysis. Through several stages of in-depth exploration, the research aimed to develop well-supported conclusions. The stages included

clarifying the issue at hand, conducting a thorough review of relevant literature, collecting and evaluating data, and synthesizing the findings into cohesive insights. Data analysis involved examining descriptive information, presenting it in tables and graphs, and connecting the results to theoretical frameworks to ensure a comprehensive interpretation. The process entails systematic collection, evaluation, and integration of data to draw well-substantiated conclusions. The primary focus of the case study was about Uzbekistan navigates its challenges, leverages its natural resource wealth, and utilizes regional partnerships to advance its economic growth (Nugrahani, 2014). Explanatory qualitative research proves to be particularly valuable when examining hypotheses, offering insightful explanations, and addressing problems through careful analysis. The role of data analysis in this context is essential, as it facilitates the extraction of critical insights that contribute to a sound scientific explanation. This process ensures that the complexities of the issues at hand are addressed in detail, preventing oversimplification and misinterpretation (Suryabrata, 2018).

The methodology for this study is multi-faceted and involves several key components. First, academic inquiry forms the basis of data collection, drawing from a diverse range of publications and official documents that are directly relevant to the research. This allows for the construction of a coherent timeline. Second, the study utilizes available data, categorizing it in a manner that highlights essential connections and correlations between various datasets. This process helps determine whether the data points are interrelated. Lastly, the analysis section delves into the relationship between the theoretical framework and the practical elements related to the case, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Krisyantono, 2014).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Result: History of Natuna Border Conflict with China

Uzbekistan, located in Central Asia, shares borders with several countries, including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. Despite its proximity to these nations, Uzbekistan faces the geographical disadvantage of being landlocked. Historically, the region that is now Uzbekistan was part of the Khwarezmian Khanate in the medieval period before transitioning to the Khanate of Bukhara. Both states contributed significantly to regional trade and policies, enhancing the economic prosperity of the area. Moreover, Uzbekistan's position along the historic Silk Road, connecting Europe to China and East Asia, has long been vital for trade. In the 19th century, Uzbekistan came under the control of the Russian Empire through a combination of conquest, war, and treaties with neighboring khanates, marking a crucial phase in its geopolitical history (Eurasian Research Institute, 2022).

Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Uzbekistan became part of the Soviet Union, and despite some infrastructural developments during the Soviet era, the landlocked status persisted. This lack of access to the sea hampered Uzbekistan's ability to fully engage in maritime industries, such as coastal tourism and fisheries. Furthermore, the absence of direct maritime access complicated Uzbekistan's participation in global shipping and trade, necessitating reliance on overland and air routes, which added significant logistical challenges and costs to its economy. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence, yet its status as a landlocked nation continued to pose challenges for its trade and development (Curtis & Glenn, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Uzbekistan landlocked conditions map  
Source: (D. Ibragimova, 2024).

The country's landlocked status, however, made it more dependent on regional partnerships to secure economic and trade opportunities. The United Nations classified Uzbekistan as one of the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), recognizing the additional obstacles it faces compared to countries with access to the sea. This classification highlighted Uzbekistan's need for closer cooperation with its neighboring states to access international markets and maintain its economic growth. Uzbekistan's lack of access to the sea has hindered its participation in industries that rely on maritime resources, such as fisheries, shipping, and coastal tourism. This disadvantage has made Uzbekistan less competitive in the global market compared to coastal countries. The reliance on land and air routes for trade has compounded these difficulties, increasing both transportation costs and logistical complexities. As a result, Uzbekistan has found itself at a relative disadvantage in terms of development, particularly when compared to nations with access to the sea, which can more easily engage in global trade and maritime industries (Тухсинов, 2025).

The geographical constraints that limit Uzbekistan's access to the sea have also influenced its political landscape. As a landlocked country, Uzbekistan has been forced to forge strong diplomatic and economic ties with neighboring countries to facilitate trade, economic development, and security. These partnerships have been crucial for Uzbekistan's ability to participate in regional and international markets, and the country has strategically used these relationships to ensure its continued economic growth. Uzbekistan's reliance on its neighbors for access to trade routes has made it highly dependent on the geopolitical stability of the Central Asian region (Jurnal Post, 2024).

Russia has been one of Uzbekistan's most important partners in navigating these challenges. As a neighboring country with both a more developed economy and a stronger military, Russia has central role in supporting Uzbekistan's economic and security interests. The historical ties between Russia and Uzbekistan, rooted in their shared Soviet past, have shaped a long-standing relationship. Since Uzbekistan's independence, Russia has remained a key partner, and their bilateral ties have expanded significantly over the years. Uzbekistan and Russia have signed numerous agreements covering a wide range of areas, including trade, defense, and politics, reinforcing their close bilateral relationship (Nurdiana, 2019).

The bilateral relationship between Uzbekistan and Russia reached a significant peak in 2001 with the joint participation of both countries in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This partnership proved beneficial for Uzbekistan, as many of its citizens migrated to Russia for better employment opportunities. In addition to economic cooperation, the security ties between the two nations strengthened through the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), providing Uzbekistan with regional security support. Despite a temporary downturn in relations following Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO twice, including a permanent exit in 2016, Russia remained an essential partner in Uzbekistan's security and economic strategy (Kromková, 2024).

Following a period of strained relations, particularly after Uzbekistan withdrew Russian military bases in 2005, the countries began to rebuild their ties in 2010. Both nations worked to strengthen cooperation, especially in the energy sector, where Russia significant role in supplying Uzbekistan with natural gas and nuclear energy expertise. Uzbekistan's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in 2006 during a period of strained relations with Russia helped to mend diplomatic ties. However, Uzbekistan later withdrew from EurAsEC in 2014. In 2017, a visit by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Moscow paved the way for a renewed partnership, culminating in trade agreements and further diplomatic cooperation (Mahadana, 2024).

In the years following the 2017 visit, Uzbekistan signed a \$3.8 billion trade agreement with Russia, marking a significant step in restoring and strengthening their bilateral relationship. This renewed cooperation has continued to evolve, with both countries signing a strategic council agreement in 2021 to further enhance bilateral collaboration in various sectors, including economy, security, and culture. Uzbekistan's partnership with Russia has thus become increasingly vital for its economic growth, regional security, and diplomatic positioning in Central Asia. By fostering strong ties with Russia, Uzbekistan has effectively navigated its landlocked position and bolstered its ability to remain competitive in the global marketplace (Gusev, 2019).

### **Various Factors of Closeness between Uzbekistan and Russia**

The cultural influence of Russia in Uzbekistan remains profound due to the more than 70 years Uzbekistan spent as part of the Soviet Union. This influence is evident across various domains such as art, literature, music, dance, theater, film, architecture, and cuisine. The long-standing interaction between the two countries has led to a deep-seated exchange in these cultural areas, which continues to shape modern Uzbek society. The geographic proximity of Uzbekistan to Russia, with only a land border of more than 200 km separating the two countries, further strengthens the relationship between them. This close proximity facilitates cultural exchanges, trade, and bilateral relations. Uzbekistan was the first former Soviet republic to have its prime minister make an official visit to Russia after the dissolution of the USSR. Furthermore, both nations have established strong economic cooperation under the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, solidifying their interconnectedness (Saida, 2025).

In the visual arts, the socialist realism style, which was dominant in the USSR, has had a lasting impact on Uzbek painters. Similarly, in literature and poetry, many Uzbek writers have adopted Russian literary styles and themes. Traditional Uzbek music and dance also reflect significant Russian influences, blending local traditions with those from the Russian cultural sphere. Modern Uzbek cuisine has also incorporated Russian cooking techniques and ingredients, demonstrating the continuing integration of Russian cultural elements (Yusupov, 2021).

Ethnically, the majority of the Uzbek population is Uzbek. However, there is a significant Russian minority, comprising around 5-6% of the total population. This Russian minority is largely the result of migration and settlement during the time when Uzbekistan was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Relations between the different ethnic groups in Uzbekistan are generally harmonious. Many ethnic Uzbeks are fluent in Russian, allowing them to easily interact with the Russian community. Inter-marriage between Uzbeks and Russians is also common, further integrating the two ethnic groups. While Uzbek is the official language of Uzbekistan, Russian remains widely spoken. During the Soviet era, Russian was the medium of instruction in schools and the official language of government administration. As a result, most Uzbeks born before the 1990s are fluent in Russian. In addition, Russian continues to be a common language of communication in daily life, particularly in large cities and among professionals. A significant number of media outlets in Uzbekistan also use Russian alongside Uzbek, reflecting its enduring presence in public life (Tsyryapkina, 2023).

Uzbekistan was once a constituent part of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991. During this period, Russia has played a pivotal role in the development of the country, providing significant assistance in the establishment of various institutions and infrastructure. This historical context has contributed to the strong cultural and economic ties between Uzbekistan and Russia, which continue to influence Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policies. The influence of Russia during the Soviet era not only shaped Uzbekistan's governance structures but also fostered close connections in various sectors, laying the groundwork for enduring relations that extend far beyond political boundaries.

Economically, Russia remains Uzbekistan's largest trading partner, accounting for nearly 40% of its total trade. Uzbekistan exports cotton, gold, and other goods to Russia, while it imports machinery, chemicals, and other products from its northern neighbor. This interdependence creates a complex economic relationship, where Uzbekistan finds it challenging to extricate itself from Russia without incurring significant economic costs. The robust trade exchange between the two nations has led to a symbiotic partnership that reinforces Uzbekistan's reliance on Russian markets and technology, making it difficult for Uzbekistan to diversify its economic partners without risking disruption in key sectors such as energy and industrial output (Safiyev & Kobilov, 2024).

Energy supply is another critical aspect of Uzbekistan's dependence on Russia, particularly regarding natural gas. Approximately 90% of Uzbekistan's natural gas is sourced from Russia, and any disruption in this supply would have severe consequences for Uzbekistan's economy and its population. The reliance on Russian gas is a key factor that solidifies the geopolitical and economic relationship between the two countries, as Uzbekistan lacks the infrastructure and resources to independently secure its energy needs. This dependency on Russia in the energy sector further

intertwines the two countries, creating a mutual vulnerability that would be challenging for Uzbekistan to navigate without extensive ramifications (Popławski & Rudnik, 2023).

In terms of regional security, Uzbekistan shares a long border with Afghanistan, a country that has long been a source of instability and conflict. Given this context, Russia has historically had a vital role as a security partner in Central Asia, and Uzbekistan views Russia as a key ally in maintaining regional stability. This mutual interest in ensuring security and stability in Central Asia has led to a close security cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia. Uzbekistan relies on Russia's military and diplomatic support to mitigate the risks associated with its unstable neighbor. Russia's involvement in regional security efforts, particularly in the context of the ongoing challenges posed by Afghanistan, ensures that the two countries maintain a collaborative approach to safeguarding their shared interests (Weitz, 2025).

Politically, Russia has had a substantial influence on Uzbekistan's political landscape, particularly in the post-Soviet era. Russian officials have actively engaged in Uzbekistan's political processes, and many Uzbek officials have received training in Russia. This deep-rooted political influence has made it difficult for Uzbekistan to sever its ties with Russia without facing serious political consequences. The training and mentorship provided by Russia, as well as the historical political alignment, have fostered a close relationship between the political elites of both countries, further entrenching Russia's influence in the decision-making processes within Uzbekistan (Popławski, 2024).

The complex web of historical, economic, energy, and security ties has created a situation where Uzbekistan's relationship with Russia is deeply embedded in its national identity and strategy. While Uzbekistan has pursued greater independence since its declaration of sovereignty in 1991, the continued reliance on Russia in various sectors remains a defining feature of its foreign and domestic policy. This dynamic creates a delicate balancing act for Uzbekistan, as it seeks to assert its independence while also maintaining the critical partnerships that sustain its political and economic stability. Russia, as both a historical partner and current geopolitical influence, remains an indispensable partner in Uzbekistan's strategic considerations.

### **Uzbekistan's Dependence and Challenges on Russia**

Uzbekistan's geographic location as a landlocked country presents significant structural challenges for the nation, particularly in accessing global markets. Being landlocked means Uzbekistan must rely on neighboring countries for trade routes, which increases transportation costs. The lack of direct access to the sea means that Uzbekistan faces higher shipping costs as it has to depend on transit countries for the movement of goods. This dependency on land and air routes to transport goods across borders not only raises costs but also creates barriers to trade, making Uzbekistan less competitive in international markets. These geographical constraints lead to higher shipping expenses, potentially hindering foreign investment, as Uzbekistan must pay more than twice the transport costs to reach transit countries, thus making it more costly to engage in global trade. The intricacies of this system are further complicated by the complex trade routes Uzbekistan must use, such as sending exports across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, which poses significant infrastructure and logistical challenges (Popławski & Rudnik, 2023).

The challenges Uzbekistan faces in its trade routes are a direct result of its landlocked status. For example, the country must traverse multiple land routes and cross two borders for goods to reach or leave the country. One route involves transporting goods from China via train or truck to Kazakhstan and then to Uzbekistan, a process complicated by post-pandemic disruptions and delays at borders such as the bottleneck at the Kazakhstan-China border. This situation is further exacerbated by the global logistics crisis, with freight delays impacting trade, especially with rising demand from the European Union for Chinese railway routes, which reduces the cargo capacity available to Uzbekistan. Another trade route runs from Vladivostok via train to Kazakhstan and then to Uzbekistan, a route that experiences significant delays, especially for seasonal goods. The third route, which passes through the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, faces additional challenges due to sanctions on Iran, increasing the complexity and cost of shipments and adding another layer of difficulty for Uzbekistan's export and import activities (Rakhimov, 2021).

Based on these complexities, Uzbekistan must maintain robust relationships with its neighboring transit countries to prevent disruptions in its trade routes. Diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with key neighbors, particularly Russia, are essential to ensure the smooth flow of trade. One example of this is the partnership between Uzbekistan and Russia, where both countries have developed significant economic cooperation, particularly in energy. Russia has significant role in Uzbekistan's trade routes as a primary transit country, and the partnership is further solidified through projects like the collaboration with Gazprom, a major Russian energy company. This relationship has expanded to include significant investments, including the involvement of Gazprombank in the financing of hydrocarbon extraction projects in Uzbekistan. Russia's support in the energy sector addresses critical water scarcity issues in Uzbekistan, helping to mitigate many of the country's ecological, economic, and social challenges related to its lack of water resources (Hashimova, 2022).

The historical ties between Russia and Uzbekistan, which date back to the 19th century, have been a key factor in fostering continued economic and geopolitical relations between the two countries. This longstanding diplomatic relationship has provided Uzbekistan with opportunities to further develop its economy and geopolitical position. The investment dynamics between Russia and Uzbekistan are particularly robust, with Russia being the largest foreign investor in Uzbekistan, accounting for 20.3% of total foreign investment in the country as of 2022, amounting to around \$2 billion. This places Russia ahead of China, which holds 16.4% of foreign investments, and Turkey, with 10.1%. Countries like Germany and the United States hold smaller shares of about 6% and 3.8%, respectively (Trading Economics, 2025).

Uzbekistan's ability to maintain its diplomatic ties with Russia has undoubtedly been a key factor in the country's continued development. The historical connection between the two countries has played a pivotal role in Uzbekistan's ability to leverage Russia as a strategic partner, particularly in energy and trade. Russia's commitment to Uzbekistan has been demonstrated through not only economic investments but also through continued support in navigating the complexities of being landlocked. These investments and collaborative efforts are vital in ensuring Uzbekistan's continued growth and development, especially in overcoming its geographical challenges. The close relationship between Uzbekistan and Russia has also facilitated other forms of cooperation, such as in the energy sector, where Russia provides vital support in helping Uzbekistan manage its energy needs. This partnership helps mitigate some of the constraints Uzbekistan faces in terms of access to global markets. The shared interest in regional stability, particularly in Central Asia, further strengthens the ties between the two countries, ensuring that their cooperation remains crucial for Uzbekistan's economic and security priorities (Burna-Asefi, 2022).

Over the years, Uzbekistan has been able to build on its strong economic ties with Russia, while also expanding its diplomatic relations in the region. This has been particularly important in strengthening Uzbekistan's role as a important country in Central Asia, providing both economic and security benefits. However, Uzbekistan must also carefully manage its dependence on Russia, ensuring that it continues to develop relationships with other nations to avoid over-reliance on any single partner. Balancing relationships with other Central Asian countries, as well as with major global powers, will be essential for Uzbekistan as it navigates the complex geopolitics of the region. The geopolitical landscape of Central Asia is continuously evolving, and Uzbekistan's strategic position in this dynamic environment requires careful diplomacy. As a landlocked country, Uzbekistan's economic and political strategies must be adapted to ensure that it can continue to benefit from its relationships with neighboring countries and major global powers. The partnership with Russia, alongside other regional collaborations, plays a key role in Uzbekistan's efforts to overcome its geographical limitations and establish itself as a leading economic and political force in the region (Weitz, 2025)

### **Discussions: Geopolitical Analysis of Landlocked and Uzbekistan's Efforts to Reduce Dependence on Russia**

Geopolitics is defined as the strategic consideration of national policies designed to achieve specific objectives, based on the geographic positioning and natural resources available to a country. It highlights the crucial role geography plays in shaping a nation's strategic decisions and

policies. For any state to survive and thrive on the global stage, it must maximize the potential of its geographic location, leveraging its natural and strategic advantages to assert national interests and achieve national goals. Geopolitical strategies are not only influenced by the natural environment but also by the political and economic landscapes surrounding a nation. Thus, understanding the geographic context is essential for crafting national strategies that effectively address the challenges of global politics (Iswardhana, 2022b).

In the context of geopolitics, geography is often seen as a determinative factor, influencing a nation's political, economic, and strategic choices. This deterministic view posits that geography is a critical element shaping a nation's policies. The position of a country on the world map significantly impacts its political landscape. For instance, countries located in strategic or contested regions often find themselves in geopolitical struggles, influencing their foreign policies and international alignments. Countries situated near powerful neighbors or within contentious regions are compelled to consider their geographical positioning when formulating defense and diplomatic strategies. These countries must take into account both the benefits and limitations their location imposes upon their ability to navigate the international system effectively. A key feature of geopolitical theory is the concept of geostrategy, which is the practical application of geographical factors in shaping national strategy. Geopolitical thinking is heavily influenced by the notion that the location of a nation influences its interactions with neighboring powers. A country situated between two dominant powers, for example, often finds its policies constrained or shaped by the geopolitical interests of its larger neighbors. In this context, the nation's diplomatic and security strategies are often dictated by the presence of surrounding superpowers. This is particularly true for nations caught in the sphere of influence of larger, more powerful states, which can impose strategic, economic, and political pressures on the smaller nations (Iswardhana, 2022a).

The concept of geographic determinism suggests that the geography of a country can directly shape its political behavior and policy preferences. It holds that the natural environment, including its location and natural resources, heavily influences the character of a nation's political system, culture, and security concerns. According to this view, geography plays a foundational role in shaping a nation's trajectory, determining its capacity for economic development, its military strategy, and its diplomatic relationships. Geopolitical theorists who advocate for geographic determinism argue that a country's physical attributes, its proximity to other powers, its access to maritime routes, its natural resources, and its climate. Geopolitics has important role in shaping its place in the world. In the international relations, the strategic positioning of a nation vis-à-vis neighboring powers plays a critical role in shaping its foreign policy and national security strategies. States located in regions that are rich in resources or along critical trade routes often find themselves at the center of geopolitical rivalries. Similarly, countries located between two or more great powers may find themselves subject to external pressures that shape their domestic and foreign policies. This scenario is particularly pertinent for countries that occupy strategic crossroads, such as those located between the East and West or between the North and South. In these contexts, national policies are shaped not only by internal factors but also by the external forces exerted by surrounding states (Iswardhana, 2020).

The influence of neighboring superpowers is particularly evident in nations caught between geopolitical rivalries. For countries positioned near major global powers, their policies often become a reflection of the interests and actions of their larger neighbors. This situation can lead to strategic dilemmas where smaller states are forced to align with or resist the geopolitical strategies of the superpowers around them. In these cases, national policies must be flexible and adaptive, as the geopolitical landscape can shift quickly. The challenge for these states is to balance their own national interests with the pressures exerted by surrounding powers, which may lead to shifting alliances and policy adjustments in response to changing global dynamics. Geopolitical strategies based on geographic determinism highlight the intersection of geography and power dynamics in shaping national policies. Countries situated in pivotal regions often find themselves at the mercy of larger geopolitical forces that influence their decisions. The theory of geographic determinism underscores the importance of understanding geographical context when analyzing national strategies, as geography is more than just a backdrop. It is a fundamental element that shapes the behavior and decisions of states on the world stage. In an increasingly interconnected world, where

the movements of nations are heavily influenced by geographical factors, geopolitical analysis remains a crucial tool for understanding global power dynamics.

Geopolitics has a fundamental role in shaping the national strategies of landlocked countries like Uzbekistan, where the geographical constraints significantly influence their economic and political decisions. Uzbekistan, being entirely enclosed by land, faces considerable challenges in accessing global markets, which are largely dependent on maritime routes. The absence of direct access to the sea has resulted in Uzbekistan's reliance on neighboring countries with coastlines, which adds complexity and cost to its international trade activities. Transportation costs for imports and exports have escalated due to the necessity of crossing multiple borders, making Uzbekistan vulnerable to geopolitical tensions with neighboring states. Furthermore, the lack of efficient transportation infrastructure within Uzbekistan poses an additional hurdle to its economic growth and integration into the global economy. This geographical disadvantage has forced Uzbekistan to strengthen its diplomatic ties with neighboring countries to ensure the smooth transit of goods.

To mitigate these challenges, Uzbekistan has pursued a series of strategic partnerships and transportation reforms aimed at reducing its dependence on any single country. Despite these geographical constraints, Uzbekistan maintained important trade routes through rail and pipeline networks, linking it to neighboring countries with maritime access. Among these efforts, Uzbekistan has focused on modernizing its transport sector, developing new logistical corridors that connect Central Asia to the Middle East. In 2011, Uzbekistan agreed to a rail corridor with Turkmenistan and Iran, providing a new route to the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, in 2011, Uzbekistan opened a new railway corridor through Afghanistan, linking Central Asia to Iran and Pakistan, offering an alternative to the traditional, land-based trade routes. These initiatives reflect Uzbekistan's commitment to diversifying its trade routes, which in turn reduces its vulnerability to regional tensions and strengthens its geopolitical standing (Burna-Asefi, 2022).

Uzbekistan has also actively sought to expand its geopolitical influence through economic partnerships with the European Union and China. In 2017, Uzbekistan's partnership with the EU entered a new phase, with the EU adopting negotiation mandates to enhance bilateral cooperation. By focusing on human rights, security, and trade, the agreement sought to create a more comprehensive partnership, highlighting Uzbekistan's potential as a central player in the region (Kobiela, 2021). Additionally, Uzbekistan's relationship with China has become increasingly significant, especially as China has invested heavily in the region, seeing Uzbekistan as a key player in Central Asia. The two countries have strengthened their economic ties through the development of new infrastructure projects, such as the railway linking China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, further opening up South Asia as a market for Uzbekistan's goods. Through these actions, Uzbekistan is striving to reduce its reliance on Russia while diversifying its economic partnerships and improving its global standing (The European External Action Service (EEAS), 2018).

Furthermore, Uzbekistan has taken steps to deepen its trade relationships with neighboring countries. In 2021, Uzbekistan and Pakistan signed the Pakistan-Uzbekistan Transit Trade Agreement (AUPTT), allowing Uzbekistan to use Afghanistan as a transit route for goods heading to Pakistan. In 2022, both nations expanded their economic cooperation with the signing of the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), which lowered tariffs on 34 products. This agreement is crucial for improving Uzbekistan's trade access to the south, particularly with Pakistan, while also enhancing its position as a key transit country. Additionally, Uzbekistan has partnered with the World Bank to modernize its aviation sector, establishing new air routes to facilitate trade and enhance the country's connectivity with global markets. This is part of a broader strategy to modernize the country's transport infrastructure, ensuring that Uzbekistan is no longer dependent on long and potentially problematic land-based trade routes (Ybyshova, 2020).

Uzbekistan's geopolitical strategy has focused on strengthening its transport network, both domestic and international, and establishing favorable conditions for foreign trade. The country has also prioritized the creation of efficient trade corridors, modernizing its infrastructure to meet international standards. The government has committed substantial resources to upgrading Uzbekistan's 11 airports, with an investment of US\$ 866.9 million, aiming to meet international

aviation standards and improve connectivity. These efforts demonstrate Uzbekistan's desire to overcome its geographic limitations, fostering greater trade with both regional and international partners, and enhancing its economic growth (Makhmudov, 2023).

Uzbekistan's geographic challenges and strategic responses illustrate its ongoing efforts to mitigate its landlocked status and establish itself as a central player in regional trade. By improving transport infrastructure, forging new economic partnerships, and diversifying its geopolitical alignments, Uzbekistan aims to reduce its reliance on any single country or route. These strategies reflect the country's commitment to improving its global position while overcoming the significant geographic barriers it faces. Through these initiatives, Uzbekistan hopes to enhance its economic independence, promote sustainable development, and solidify its place within the broader geopolitical landscape of Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's strategy exemplifies the importance of adaptive geopolitical thinking in the modern world. Despite its landlocked status, Uzbekistan has managed to navigate its challenges by seeking out new opportunities for economic growth, reducing its dependence on traditional power structures, and actively pursuing regional cooperation. As the country continues to diversify its trade routes and strengthen its political relationships, it is positioned to play a more significant role in both regional and global affairs, while also setting a precedent for other landlocked countries facing similar geopolitical challenges.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

landlocked countries face significant challenges when it comes to accessing international trade, as they are heavily reliant on transit states with direct access to the sea. For Uzbekistan, Russia has historically been a key trade route due to the infrastructure established in the 19th century, linking Central Asia to Russia. This reliance on Russian routes has not only shaped Uzbekistan's economic trajectory but has also influenced its political landscape. The asymmetric relationship between the two countries has extended beyond economic dependency, involving Uzbekistan's security and political stability within the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan continues to face internal challenges such as corruption, terrorism, and separatism, which further exacerbate the nation's reliance on Russia for stability and security.

However, despite the heavy influence exerted by Russia, Uzbekistan has made deliberate efforts to reduce its dependence on the Russian state. This is evident through initiatives aimed at diversifying its trade routes, such as the expansion of Central Asian railway networks and the enhancement of air transport connections. Additionally, Uzbekistan has explored alternative trade routes through Afghanistan and Pakistan, reflecting a strategic shift to lessen reliance on Russia. These actions underscore Uzbekistan's intention to enhance its geopolitical flexibility by establishing new trade corridors, thus mitigating its dependency on Russia.

Uzbekistan's strategic maneuvering highlights the importance of diversifying geopolitical and economic partnerships for landlocked nations. While the historical relationship with Russia remains influential, Uzbekistan's efforts to secure alternative routes and strengthen ties with regional partners such as Pakistan and Afghanistan demonstrate the country's desire for greater autonomy. By diversifying its transport and trade networks, Uzbekistan is laying the groundwork for a more independent and resilient economy, capable of navigating the complexities of the modern geopolitical landscape.

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